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BUILDING THE SUBURBAN DREAM

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Collections of The State Museum of Pennsylvania

March, 1952 ▼

Using assembly line techniques, work crews begin construction on the first of Levittown's 17,311 homes. At their peak, Levitt's crews turn out 40 units per day. "We are not builders. We are manufacturers," Bill Levitt declares.

Courtesy of Temple University, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

December, 1951 ▲

Thousands of prospective homeowners converge on Levitt and Sons sales offices to inspect one of three samples on display during opening weekend. At $9,990, the single-floor *Levittowner* is a customer favorite. In less than two months nearly 3,000 are sold.

Courtesy of Temple University, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

June, 1952 ▲

Levittown's first 20 families take up residence in the development's Stonybrook section. Most are couples under 30 with children under five. "There are no grandparents in Levittown," quips one observer.

June, 1953 ▼

Priced at $1,000 below the *Levittowner*, the *Rancher* offers an attic that can be expanded into two extra bedrooms and a bath. By August, it becomes the nation's #1 bestseller. In all, Levittown would feature six different house models, each in several different styles.

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September, 1955 ▼

Walt Disney arrives for dedication of the first school in the country named in his honor and one of eight elementary schools built on Levitt-donated land. For many residents, Levittown's modern, conveniently located schools are a major draw.

On loan from Jean Purcell.

Courtesy of the Levittown Regional Library.

February, 1954 ▲

With space for over 60 vendors and 5,000 cars, the 60-acre Levittown Shop-A-Rama is promoted as the largest pedestrian mall east of the Mississippi. During the 1950s, it serves as Levittown's Main Street, hosting everything from beauty pageants to political rallies.

From the Levittown Outlook, *Dec. 1958.*

March, 1956 ▲

Levittown's Little League program enters its third season. With so many preadolescents, interest in organized youth baseball runs high. In 1960, players from the Levittown American League win the Little League World Series held in Williamsport, Pa.

Courtesy of Temple University, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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August, 1957 ▼

Daisy and Bill Myers become Levittown's first African American residents. Crowds opposed to racial integration gather outside the Myers home and harass the family and their supporters. Governor Leader orders state troopers to Levittown to keep the peace.

Courtesy of the Spruance Library, Bucks County Historical Society.

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Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

December, 1957 ▲

Final house slab laid in Twin Oaks, the last of Levittown's forty neighborhoods or "sections." With more than 70,000 residents, Levittown becomes equivalent in size to Pennsylvania's 10th largest city.

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The Most Perfectly Planned Community in America!

The brainchild of developer William J. Levitt, Levittown, Pennsylvania was the largest planned community constructed by a single builder in the United States. By the time it was completed in 1958, the development spread across 5,500 acres in lower Bucks County and included churches, schools, swimming pools, shopping centers and 17,311 single-family homes.

To its 70,000-plus residents, Levittown represented the American Dream of home ownership. To many others, Levittown epitomized postwar suburbia – a place often criticized but widely copied.

In honor of its 50th anniversary, this exhibit explores the history of Levittown from the perspective of those who built and lived the suburban dream.

Curt Miner

Curt Miner
Senior Curator of Popular Culture

Photo courtesy of Paul Gouza.

Levittown Pa.
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